

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT EG
SUBJECT: DRAFT PARTY LAW

SUMMARY. PLENARY PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY WILL DEBATE NEW PARTY LAW MAY 28, KEY EVENT IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN POLITICAL HISTORY. DRAFT LAW WOULD ALLOW ANY 20 CURRENT PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY MEMBERS FOUND THEIR OWN PARTY, A PROVISION WHICH LIKELY TO DESTROY MAJORITY STATUS NOW ENJOYED BY GOVERNMENT'S CENTRIST PARTY. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR LAST SEVERAL WEEKS, SPECIAL COMMITTEE IN PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY HAS SOUGHT PUT TOGETHER LAW ESTABLISHING AND REGULATING THE NEW PARTY SYSTEM SANCTIONED BY PRESIDENT SADAT LAST NOVEMBER. GROUP HAS HAD HIGH LEVEL GUIDANCE, BUT DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS HAVE APPARENTLY NOT BEEN ISSUED. INITIALLY, PLAN WAS TO AMEND ARTICLE 5 OF CONSTITUTION WHICH GIVES LEGAL EXISTENCE TO ARAB SOCIALIST UNION, THE "ALLIANCE OF PEOPLES WORKING FORCES" WHICH IS TO BE SUPPLANTED BY NEW PARTY SYSTEM. (ASU WILL CONTINUE IN EXISTENCE, BUT ONLY AS VENUE FOR SUCH SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONS AS YOUTH AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS). SPECIAL PA COMMITTEE HAS DECIDED, HOWEVER,
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NOT TO DRAFT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, BUT SIMPLY DRAFT PARTY LAW.

2. DRAFT BILL IS SCHEDULED FOR PLENARY DISCUSSION MAY 28. AT PRESENT, IT REQUIRES THAT A PARTY MUST CONTAIN AT MINIMUM 20 PRESENT PEOPLES ASSEMBLY MEMBERS. ONLY EXCEPTION IS FOR PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED PARTIES, A NECESSARY

PROVISION SINCE OF THE THREE EXISTING GROUPS, LEFTIST PARTY HAS ONLY TWO PA MEMBERS AND RIGHTIST PARTY HAS 12.

3. IN MEETING WITH EMBOFF MAY 26, DR. AHMAD ABU ISMAIL, FORMER MINFIN AND INDEPENDENTLY MINDED CENTER PARTY MEMBER, SAID THAT BILL WILL FACE DETERMINED OPPOSITION IN ASSEMBLY. MAJOR OPPONENTS WILL BE SOME MEMBERS OF CENTER PARTY, TO WHICH ALL GOE MINISTERS BELONG AND WHICH ENJOYS LARGE MAJORITY. ABU ISMAIL POINTED OUT, WE THINK ACCURATELY, THAT CENTER PARTY RANKS INCLUDE 30-35 MEMBERS OF FORMER WAFD PARTY, WHO ARE EAGER TO FORM THEIR OWN GROUP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. ABU ISMAIL ARGUED THAT EGYPTIAN POPULATION REMAINS BASICALLY WAFDIST IN SYMPATHY AND THUS CENTER PARTY COULD EXPECT TO BE WIPED OUT IN NEXT ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH ABU ISMAIL DID NOT SAY SO, IT IS NOT JUST OLD WAFDISTS WHO WISH RE-FORM UNDER OLD PARTY FLAGS. THERE ARE, FOR EXAMPLE, CENTER PARTY MEMBERS WHO ARE LOYAL TO PRINCIPLES OF THE OLD S'DIST PARTY WHICH GAVE SPEAKER MAR'I HIS POLITICAL START.

4. CLEARLY, LAW AS IT STANDS MIGHT NOT PASS. ABU ISMAIL THINKS IT DEFINITELY WOULD NOT RECEIVE MAJORITY APPROVAL, BUT POINTS OUT THAT PRESIDENT SADAT MAY INSIST SOME VERSION BE APPROVED. IF SO, PARLIAMENTARIANS MUST DEAL WITH IT SERIOUSLY. ABU ISMAIL SUGGESTED THAT IN ORDER GAIN ITS ACCEPTANCE, CENTRIST PARTY WILL MOVE TO EMASCULATE PRESENT DRAFT. THIS MIGHT BE DONE, HE SPECULATED, BY POSTPONING FORMATION OF NEW PARTIES (OTHER THAN THE PRESENT THREE) UNTIL NEXT SCHEDULED ELECTIONS IN 1981, OR BY FORBIDDING ANY NEW PARTIES TO USE NAMES OR ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF FORMER PARTIES (E.G. THE WAFD). LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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5. COMMENT: ABU ISMAIL OBJECTION TO PROVISION IN DRAFT BILL SPARING THE EXISTING LEFTIST AND RIGHTIST PARTIES FROM PROPOSED RULE THAT ALL NEW PARTIES MUST CONTAIN AT LEAST 20 SITTING MEMBERS IS A COMMON VIEW OF EGYPTIAN INTELLECTUALS, WHO ARGUE THAT IF ANY POLITICAL SYSTEM IS TO BE VIABLE, IT MUST NOT BE ARTIFICALLY IMPOSED FROM THE TOP. PROVISION IS THERE, HOWEVER, BECAUSE, AS ANOTHER LEADING PARLIAMENTARIAN CONFIDED TO US SOME WEEKS AGO, SADAT AND SPEAKER MAR'I WERE CONCERNED THAT ANY NEW LAW NOT SMACK OF A WITCHHUNT AGAINST CURRENT MARXIST MEMBERS. MANY PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY LEADERS ARE CONVINCED, AS IS ABU ISMAIL, THAT ONLY FREE FORMATION OF PARTIES WILL GUARANTEE CONTINUED DEMOCRACY AND PROSPERITY IN EGYPT. SADAT, HOWEVER, IS CONCERNED ABOUT TWO FACTORS. FIRST, WHAT HE CALLS THE "PORTUGUESE" MODEL, WHICH HE PERCEIVES AS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE EXPLOSION OF DEMOCRACY AFTER LONG PERIOD OF REPRESSION, IN WHICH TINY PARTIES COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER IN MANNER WHICH IMPEDES NORMAL BUSINESS OF

GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATURE. SECOND, PRESIDENT IS DETERMINED
THAT AMBITIOUS POLITICAL LEADERS BE PROHIBITED FROM PLAYING
PRE-1952 GAME OR ORGANIZING SPLINTER GROUPS FOR SOLE
PURPOSE OF PROMOTING THEMSELVES.

6. ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON PARTY LAW COULD BE LANDMARK IN
CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY. HOW IT WILL REFLECT PRESIDENT'S
NEW "PHILOSOPHY" OF "DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM" BASED ON A
"STATE OF INSTITUTIONS" REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
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